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ABSTRACT

Many educators agree that they must be concerned with standards of conduct, referred to by some as character education and by others as moral education. However, schools should not and cannot bear the entire responsibility. The responsibility should be shared by many, among them the families, private and public agencies, and health care and social service agencies. Educators must not indoctrinate students, nor should there be accusations of indoctrination when such is not the case. In planning programs dealing with standards of conduct, it would be wise for educators to select those standards that are necessary for the preservation of the democratic way of life. Implications include: (1) educators should seriously consider including programs dealing with standards of conduct in addition to, or combined with, the usual courses of study offered; (2) young people should have a part in solving any problems affecting them; (3) administrators should provide open discussions for teachers in which such things as their verbal behavior, their choice of materials, and their demeanor are discussed as to their importance in avoiding conflict; (4) in correcting misbehavior and in designing programs, the uniqueness of each child concerned must be taken into account; (5) involvement of the entire community should be sought; and (6) teachers should avail themselves of all available books and periodicals dealing with standards of conduct. (Contains 10-item bibliography.) (RS)

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Character Education? Moral Education? Standards?
A Discussion

Currently, we are getting a great many reports in reputable educational periodicals, in newspapers, in magazines, on TV and from the general public about teaching something beyond the usual subjects. Some use the word, values; others refer to it as standards; some speak of moral education; and there are those who refer to it as character education.

Most teachers who have taught for some time have known of a brilliant student or two who were unable to succeed in the work force because they had no respect for others not so "heavily endowed" as they thought they were.

Teachers may have known of others who left jobs because, as one young man put it, "I'd rather stay in bed and collect unemployment than work for the minimum wage." Wouldn't pride and fairness be a better attitude for this young man? Might we be able to help him to see that he is cheating himself from gaining the experience needed for a higher-paying job and, in so doing, see an improvement in his attitude and some pride in himself?

The above examples, two among many, indicate that, perhaps, there is something beyond knowledge in one's field for becoming a productive, law-abiding and happy citizen, and that educators should give it some serious thought.

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In planning a "values program," it would be advisable to avoid controversy, as it inhibits progress. The consideration of universal values might help to avoid controversy. Kelly Thompson (9) reports that Thomas Lickona, a psychologist and education professor, says, "Research shows that there are universal values that occur in every culture, and they shape what it means to be a human being." Thompson offered more information on the speech Lickona gave recently at Durham Academy, in Durham, North Carolina. Some of his comments follow:

Teaching values is at least as important for schools as academic subjects - and, in turn, enhances students' classroom performance - a national author told Triangle audiences this week. Lickona, whose book, "Educating for Character," won the 1992 Christopher Award for "affirming the highest values of the human spirit," argued that much of the controversy surrounding the subject of values education is misplaced.

For a long time in America, if you said schools should teach values the immediate response was, 'Whose values?'" Lickona said, "It was a conversation stopper."

Lickona asked his audience to come up with a list of such qualities, and the results corresponded closely to other research: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

But he pointed to the increase in violence, hate crimes, suicide and other problems among U.S. students and argued that such values are starting to erode.

Families, churches and schools will have to work to rebuild them, Lickona

added. Schools already teach these values through many of their rules - such as those that forbid cheating - but he urged teachers to do a more deliberate job of teaching such ethics to their children.

"Schools inevitably teach moral lessons just by virtue of being social organizations," Lickona added.

"But discipline has to be a tool for moral development, not just a method of crowd control. The long-term goal of student discipline should be to get students to follow rules because it is the right thing to do."

And in the process, Lickona argued, values education activities can also enhance students' academic skills and their schools' learning environments.

For example, he suggested telling stories and asking students to write about ethical issues and changes in manners. And he strongly emphasized using democratic decision-making with students. He offered an example of students' participation in the satisfactory solution of a problem that was a serious concern of both the administration and the student body.

In the June 12, 1995 issue of New York Teacher, there appeared the huge title, "Questions of Character," with the subtitle, "Character education is the latest trend as schools add 'respect' and 'responsibility' to the three R's." In the article that follows, Sandberg (7) explains a number of the programs embracing character education that are being carried out in a growing number of New York State school districts. It is reported that, in each case,

teachers, staff and parents agreed that basic virtues should be taught.

Ken Schroeder (8), Managing Editor of Education Digest, offered several education briefs, one of which was "Character Counts". About it, he wrote:

Two years ago, educators, youth leaders and ethics scholars met in Aspen, Colorado, and identified six core ethics values that were felt to "form the foundation of democratic society": trustworthiness; respect; responsibility; justice and fairness; caring; and civic virtue and citizenship. The Aspen Declaration on Character Education has now generated a coalition and campaign headed by Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics, sponsor of the Aspen gathering. The Institute is also developing curricular materials which will be available some time this year.

It was encouraging to note that young people were also participants, as it is felt that they should have a part in the solution of any problem affecting them.

Raymond Calabrese and Angela M. Barton (1) have contributed an article, "Teaching Students to be Part of a Democratic Society." In it, they have called the school "the renewal agent of a democratic society" and have explained renewal as "the kindling of a spirit in the young that they have a responsibility to shape the evolving direction of their democracy, to build democracy more

inclusive, more fair, more responsible and more open than their parents." They have offered five themes to be considered when focusing on the concept of a democracy:

1. A democracy is a group of people who choose their own destiny.
2. A democracy is an inclusive community.
3. A democracy promotes fundamental human values of justice.
4. In a democratic society, each person feels a responsibility to self and to others.
5. A democracy promotes discourse and debate in a civil environment.

Terrence M. Tice (10), an educational consultant, says that one of the causes and symptoms and poorly met conflicts in today's society is a growing lack of civility. As a component of character, civility is best learned by example, and it can scarcely be learned under conditions of disregard and disrespect. One of the places where those conditions and the lack of them can be at least learned is in civics education.

Neil Postman (6), professor of Media Psychology and Chair, Department of Culture and Communication, New York University, New York City, is another, among noted educators who feel that we must be concerned with teaching those values deemed necessary for perpetuating our democratic way of life.

Postman says that the great problems of education are of a social and moral nature, not the new technology which, he feels, is not a solution, but a problem to be solved. In summarizing his article, "Technology as a Dazzling Distraction," Postman says:

Let me summarize in two ways what I mean. First, I'll cite my friend, Alan Kay, sometimes called, "the father of the personal computer," who likes to remind us that any problems the schools cannot solve without machines, they cannot solve with them. Second, if a nuclear holocaust should occur, if children are starving, if crime terrorizes our cities, marriages are breaking up, mental disorders are increasing, and children are being abused, none of this happens because of lack of information. It happens because we lack something else. It is the "something else" that is now the business of schools.

Granted, the schools are most certainly involved, but many others share the responsibility. William E. Klingele (5), Professor and Dean, college of Education, University of Akron, Ohio, has this to say:

Teachers and education in general cannot overcome student social, personal, physical, and psychological problems, the solution to which is prerequisite to improved learning.

Significant education improvement will require full collaboration from a community of learning impactors. Agencies, community groups, service organizations, and other community

impactors will want more influence on the schools.

The media must take on responsibility for societal improvement, facilitating school success. Television and movies could have a tremendous impact on learning by emphasizing the same values taught in the schools. Current programming, it could be argued, is doing just the opposite.

Moral education will continue to face opposition by groups that do not want concepts that "should be taught in the home" taught in school. Parents will want to influence schools more directly if they are to become more actively involved and held responsible.

There are a number of people, parents and teachers among them, who believe that the Constitution doesn't allow any religious expression in the public schools. President Clinton has been working lately on trying to establish guidelines within the law.

Terence Hunt (4), in a report, "Clinton Spells Out Guidelines for School Prayer" (Assoc. Press article), Hunt writes, "Specifically, Clinton directed the Education Department to issue guidelines on religious activities to the nation's 15,000 school districts before classes resume in the fall."

In another Associated Press article, John F. Harris (3) writes:

In his directive ordering the statement to schools, Clinton said Justice Department lawyers have assured him the law gives students the right to pray privately or to express religious

views in homework assignments and that schools are obligated to give religious gatherings the same meeting privileges they give other extracurricular groups. But his statement also reiterated the current Supreme Court view that "school officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation."

Clinton added that "some students have been wrongly prohibited from saying grace before lunch, something the Supreme Court has ruled the Constitution plainly protects." It is felt that in the best interests of children, school officials should make it their business to learn of pertinent Supreme Court decisions and thus not be intimidated by a few "disgruntled" people.

Throughout the many decades, children were heard telling their classmates about the good time they had at a church-related function. Their classmates seemed to enjoy hearing them, judging by their smiles, their questions and their intent listening.

To discourage this sharing of experiences would be grossly unfair as it would be denying free speech. Experience has been convincing in the fact that free speech enables teachers to learn more about their students and, therefore, are better able to help them.

It is felt that school officials would do well to have open discussions with parents, teachers and any others interested, to hear any objections to school activities and

to explain the school's position to them and answer any questions they might have. It is felt that this might clarify and/or ward off misinterpretations which are detrimental to progress.

It is believed that teachers' verbal behavior and the choice of material should be given careful consideration and that teachers should be given adequate help in this regard. A couple of examples, chosen among many are offered in support of this belief.

A kindergarten teacher, very much interested in helping little children, wanted to do something to keep them from "diving" at their milk and crackers at snack time, so she taught them the following verse which they recited prior to eating their snacks. She thought this would "slow them down":

Thank you for the world so sweet,
Thank you for the food we eat,
Thank you for the birds that sing,
Thank you, God, for everything.

One day, just as the children were repeating the verse, a mother came into the room with galoshes for her little girl, as it had begun to rain after the child had left for school. Upon hearing the children reciting the verse, the mother exclaimed, "Miss K., if my husband knew this, he'd have the roof off this place."

The teacher cried because her intent was simply to help the children, not to indoctrinate them. When the mother saw the teacher weeping, she tried to console her by saying, "Because you're so kind to the children, Miss K., I won't tell my husband."

Personally interested in the origin of the little verse known to me for many years, I had an excellent children's librarian, in a large county library, research it. She found that it was written by an English woman, Mrs. E. Rutter Leatham. She found further that in 1990, Macmillan Publishing Company included it in a book, the title of which is Thanks Be To God, with the subtitle "Prayers From Around the World."

Thought of what he might consider a religious connection, and the fact that the recitation of the verse was initiated by a teacher may be an explanation of her husband's fury.

It is felt that this unpleasant case could have been avoided if the teacher had learned of alternatives to using the verse through open discussion with the principal and staff. Forming lines comes to mind as one example among several.

In another case, a first grade teacher found a little girl cheating and reprimanded her for so doing. When the little child arrive home that afternoon, she was crying.

When her mother found out why, she lost no time in getting to the principal's office where she complained bitterly about her child's emotional upset and also questioned the cheating. So great was her power of persuasion that she convinced the principal that her child had been mistreated.

When the woman left, the principal sent for the teacher and reprimanded her severely. He told her in no uncertain terms that she had no right whatever to inflict her morals on little children.

It is not known if the teacher used language with religious connections, but it is felt that administrators should hold open discussions with teachers as to the importance of teachers' verbal behavior, especially when it's concerned with sensitive issues. It is strongly felt that teachers should be helped "before the fact," not reprimanded "after the fact."

Children's misbehavior should be interpreted in terms of the child concerned. His/her ability to understand and to reason as well as the severity of the infraction, the number of times it has been repeated, etc. The case of Harding is a case in point.

Harding came from a poor and uneducated, but self-supporting and loving family. The children were not afforded transportation, so Harding ("Hardin," as his

sisters called him) walked to school each day carrying the small suitcase packed with sandwiches for their lunch.

One day one of his sisters came crying to her teacher and in a story, interspersed with sobs, informed her thus: "Hardin' et his sanwitches, and den he et mine."

The teacher sent for Harding, and, immediately, this tall slender lad came loping toward her. In answer to why he had eaten his sister's sandwich, Harding replied emphatically, "I was hungry!" This was easy to believe as Harding was seldom still.

Harding was a caring lad. He was truly sorry that he "et" his sister's "sanwitches," but his understandable hunger had taken precedence momentarily over his caring. He was happy to hear that his sister's teacher was sharing her lunch with her, and he promised not to repeat the act, and never did.

Years later, Harding, in a troubled marriage, chose one day to bring his two little children to his mother's house, feed them, and then go out to the garage where, according to the sister, whose sandwiches Harding had eaten, sadly informed the teacher, whom she met on the street, in these words, which saddened the teacher as well: "Hardin hanged hisself."

Apparently, the teacher concerned handled the case with good judgment. Had Harding asked his sister to share her

lunch with him, she, undoubtedly, would have agreed, but Harding's hunger was so great and his thinking power quite limited that they took precedence, momentarily, over his usual caring.

It was just learned that a group of parents had requested that some religion be taught in the schools. This was carefully considered by the school authorities, and two courses, "The Bible as Literature" and "World Religions," were approved. It is understood that they are to be offered in the Raleigh, North Carolina High School this coming September (1995).

It is also understood that the Board has hired a lawyer in order to avoid trouble by keeping everything within the law.

Some of the commendable features of the above undertaking are the age level of the students to whom they are being offered; the choice of names for the courses; and the hiring of a lawyer.

It must be understood that the location of the school is extremely advantageous. The area is surrounded by universities which offer many advantages. It must be remembered, too, that parents were the initiators.

There are other communities without these advantages. To be successful, programs must be realistically designed in

keeping with the resources in and around the community in which it will be used.

Throughout decades, witness was borne to the failure of programs "copied." Though they were a success in one area, they were a dismal failure in another.

Conclusion

It is concluded that there is general agreement among many educators that they must be concerned with standards of conduct, referred to by some as character education and by others as moral education. However, it is strongly felt that schools should not, and cannot bear the entire responsibility. The responsibility is shared by many, among them, the families, private and public agencies, and health care and social service agencies. Obviously, a child in poor health and a distressed child aren't able to concentrate on their lessons.

It is further concluded that there must be no indoctrination in our teaching nor should there be accusations of indoctrination when such is not the case.

It is finally concluded that in planning programs dealing with standards of conduct, it would be wise to select those standards that are necessary for the preservation of the democratic way of life.

Implications

1. Educators should seriously consider including programs dealing with standards of conduct in addition to, or combined with, the usual courses of study offered.

2. To avoid conflict, it is felt wise to choose standards that are considered universal and necessary for perpetuating the democratic way of life, the life so many immigrants have sought here.

3. Young people should have a part in solving any problem affecting them.

4. There must be no indoctrination of students.

5. Teachers should not be accused of indoctrination when such is not the case.

6. Administrators should provide open discussions for teachers in which such things as their verbal behavior, their choice of material and their demeanor are discussed as to their importance in avoiding conflict.

7. Educators should be patient with parents in open discussions with them, as many parents are facing daily dilemmas over standards of conduct. Some of their concerns are with the media and TV programs. (See reference 2.)

8. Teachers interested in how parents feel about standards of conduct can learn a lot by reading parents' letters in the editorial section of various newspapers.

9. In correcting misbehavior and in designing programs, the uniqueness of each child concerned must be taken into account.

10. Free speech should not be inhibited, as it is through free speech that teachers are able to help a child.

11. Schools should not, and can not, be responsible for appropriate standards of conduct for all students. Many (stated earlier in this report) share this responsibility.

12. Involvement of the entire community should be sought. Since the school is a part of the community, standards of conduct upheld in the schools have a positive effect on the community, and those upheld in the community have a positive effect on the schools.

13. Teachers should avail themselves of all available books and periodicals dealing with standards of conduct. (Librarians can be a great help.)

14. Teachers might do well to consider the reciprocal processes in the various schools subjects - English and History, for example, as their cooperation in this regard could enhance their teaching of appropriate standards of conduct for the democratic way of life and also result in more student involvement, interest and enjoyment.

15. Teachers should exercise their voting privileges and vote for those who are definitely interested in the

welfare of children and in providing the means needed for teachers to do the job they are capable of doing.

16. A positive attitude must be kept by all concerned if appropriate standards of conduct are to be achieved.

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